DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 335 727 CS 507 565

AUTHOR Bjorklun, Douglas; And Others
TITLE Communication Studies: Undergraduate Programs.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association (Chicago, IL, April 11-14, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Curriculum; Communication Research; Core Curriculum; Educational Research; Higher Education; School Surveys; Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; *Speech Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Speech Communication Education; United States (Central)

ABSTRACT

A study aimed to provide information about the current communication curriculum offered through undergraduate programs. A systematic search of the undergraduate catalogs of 565 institutions was conducted viewing Speech Communication Programs available in the Central States region. Results indicated that all but five institutions offered at least one communication course, and that the most popular course was public speaking. The popularity of other courses ranged from interpersonal communication at 68% of the schools to research methods courses at 11%. Findings demonstrated that some type of basic communication course (usually the public speaking course) was required of all students, rather than just majors, in 71% of the institutions. Other required courses fell under the interpersonal or survey categories. Results suggest that although there is no "typical" communication program in the Central States region, communication is viewed as a vital segment of college academic programs. (Three tables are included; a copy of the survey instrument is attached.) (PRA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED335727

COMMUNICATION STUDIES: UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

By

Douglas Bjorklun
Kearney State College
Kearney, Nebraska

Sandra K. Cavanaugh
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, Nebraska

George Lawson
Kearney State College
Kearney, Nebraska

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sandra Cavanaugh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Chicago, IL. April, 1991.

CS507565

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In recent years Fischler (1989) has caused a great uproar within the communication field. Fischler authored an editorial published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* attacking the field of communication saying it is repetitive, insignificant, and seemingly senseless. This attack was apparently based upon Fischler's one year experience with a business and technical communication class while he was a visiting professor. The lone editorial appears to have generated an enormous negative response and defensiveness from professionals in the communication field. Macke, (1991), summarizes:

> "if Fischler would take the time to examine a copy of any one of the many excellent journals in the field, or attend one of the annual conventions sponsored by any one of the established professional associations, he would gain a dramatically different view of the discipline and perhaps feel a little foolish about having gone out on a limb to compare teaching communication to Dante's inferno," (p. 126).

Macke, (1991), suggests Fischler should examine the scholarly journals or attend one of the conventions before assigning positive or negative value to the field.

Possibly another way of gaining a grasp of what the communication field is about is through the exploration of

undergraduate curriculum that is offered at many colleges and universities. The purpose of this study is not necessarily to dispute Fischler's perspective, but to provide a profile of bachelors degree programs. For the purposes of this research only those institutions within the Central States Communication Association region will be considered. Specifically this research is intended to provide information about the current curriculum offered through undergraduate programs. Although this study was prompted by the ongoing "value of communication" dispute, it is intended to be a general rather than a specific overview of these programs, and is informational in nature rather than evaluative.

METHOD

Subjects

A collection of college catalogs is compiled by The Career Guidance Foundation. A systematic search of the undergraduate catalogs was conducted viewing Speech Communication Programs available in the colleges in the Central States region. The programs in North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio were

included in the study. There are 908 institutions of higher education in this 13 state region. These institutions were narrowed to 565. Graduate schools, religious seminaries, and technical colleges were eliminated for this study.

Instrument

The instrument was a three part questionnaire designed by the research team for this investigation of Speech Communication departments in undergraduate institutions in this 13 state area. The questionnaire included three areas of focus: demographic information such as school name, location, and size; specific departmental course offerings; and basic course offerings and requirements. (SEE APPENDIX A)

Survey

This extensive investigation was conducted exclusively by this team with one member viewing microfiche versions of each of the 565 catalogs. The other two members checked the compiled data for accuracy and statistical information. This technique was chosen for reasons of accuracy and higher return which would not have been possible in a mailing

survey. One hundred percent of the undergraduate institutions, which were represented in the catalogs, in the thirteen state area were searched. This method also assured the information gathered would be relevant to the study.

Results

In the thirteen states covered the number of catalogs reviewed ranged from a high in Illinois of 104 to a low in South Dakota of 13 bringing the total to 565. Of these 565 institutions 185 or 33% were two year colleges and 380 or 67% were four year institutions.

INSERT TABLE ONE

All but five institutions had at least one communication course offering, resulting in a significant total of 99%. The most popular course was public speaking offered at 531 colleges or 94% of the institutions. The popularity of other courses offered ranged from interpersonal communication visible at 386 or 68% of the schools to research methods courses at 66 schools or 11%, at the other end of the scale.

INSERT TABLE TWO

Findings of the investigation revealed that some type of basic communication course was required of all students, rather than just majors, in 405 or 71% of the institutions. This study identified the public speaking course as the most frequently required in the institutions, accounting for 314 of the 405 basic courses. The other required courses fell under the interpersonal or survey categories.

INSERT TABLE THREE

DISCUSSION

Of the 565 institutions reviewed, some 560 had some variation of speech course or program offered in their curriculum. This high number would seem to indicate that communication is viewed as a vital segment of college academic programs in the Central States region. Though the programs differ in scope and depth among the schools, it appears that speech has a healthy role in academia.

The course offered most frequently is public speaking, 94% of the schools have this class offering. Second in popularity is the interpersonal area. Included in this area are courses such as small group, interviewing, intrapersonal, relational, and leadership. This would suggest a continuance of the interpersonal trend, born in the sixties, of a shifting toward the social sciences by communication departments. An interesting discovery is that these interpersonal courses (68%), have surpassed the rhetoric course offerings (54%). Interesting, yet surprising because rhetoric was once considered the foundation of the communication field. However, communication theory classes are still represented in some 190 or 33% of the schools.

A link to the past still strong and visible is the speech-theatre tie, with 48% of schools still grouping the two. In many cases, when the they are combined, theatre courses take precedence. Those schools who offer forensics for credit, 238 or 42%, would indicate a strong interest in competitive speech events in the region.

Research verifies that communication in the organization is critical to organizational health, effectiveness, and possibly even productivity. The Central

States, appearing to recognize this need are offering 211 courses (37%) in organizational communication. Additionally, many departments are currently offering business and professional speaking classes.

The large number of intercultural communication classes offered (124 or 22%), appears to reflect the sensitivity and openness of the field to search for and understanding of the communication of people from all backgrounds and a commitment toward the need for cultural awareness.

This review revealed a large number of mass communication classes offered in the Central States region. The total of classes offered was 318 amounting to 56 percent. This large representation appears to reflect the importance of today's technology and the effort the field is exerting to become the "information science." Along with these courses 119 or 21% offer courses in public relations/advertising.

The number of courses focusing on research methods at the undergraduate level is relatively small. Out of the total 3333 offerings only 66 or 11% were directed in this area. Another small representation in the region is in the area of political communication, with 85 or 15% offered.

Teaching method classes are offered in 155 (27%) of the schools studied. The small number here perhaps reflects that teaching methods courses are sometimes taught in education departments instead of departments of the specific major.

A small representation of classes in the areas of health communication, family communication, and gender communication are available through some communication departments, basically in the larger institutions. This would seem to be evidence of the "branching out" of the field in response to concerns from areas where communication depth and clarity is critical.

The third, and final focus, of this investigation centered on a search for the number of institutions requiring a basic speech course as part of their core curriculum. This basic course was found to be a requisite in 405 institutions or 71% of those surveyed. The number one required course was public speaking with 314 or 77% of the 405. The next highest was the interpersonal course required by 75 or 18% of the 405 schools. The last type of course was a survey or "hybrid" course it was used by 49 (12%) of the colleges. These numbers would seem to indicate that

communication is viewed by the majority of colleges as basic to ones educational experience.

SUMMARY

In summary, this investigation has presented an overview of the speech/communication programs in the Central States area. This study has identified the two and four year schools offering communication courses, the types of courses offered, and the requirements of some type of a basic communication course by institutions in the region.

This study also provided significant data which might be utilized for more intensive further studies such as a five year comparative study or a more thorough investigation of communication offerings in two year schools. The information presented in this study is only as accurate as the catalogs information that was searched. Also some catalogs may have been omitted from the collection.

Although this information-gathering study has not been an attempt to join sides in the "value and significance of communication" dispute, the results seem to reflect the attempts of the communication professionals and their respective departments to meet the challenges, concerns, and needs of the "Information Age," through course offerings.

This study did reveal there is no "typical" communication program in the Central States region. There are many commonalities as well as significant diversities.

As Macke, (1991, p. 140-141), emphasized: "through the study of speech...more than philosophy,...students can be led to an awareness of what it means to be a person."

INSTITUTION: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Institution Enrollment: _____ Faculty Size: _____

Department: _____

Majors (List): _____

_____

Course Offerings: (Check in area that has at least one course)

_____ Intercultural	_____ Interpersonal	_____ Methods
_____ Organizational	_____ Oral Interp	_____ Speech/Hearing Science
_____ Public Address	_____ Political	_____ Theatre
_____ Public Relations	_____ Rhetoric	_____ Mass Comm
_____ Communication Theory	_____ Education	_____ Small Group

Forensic Program: _____ Yes _____ No

Basic Course; Required of all students: _____ Yes _____ No

Required of some students: _____

_____

Type Required:

_____ Public Speaking	_____ Theory
_____ Survey	_____ Rhetoric
_____ Interpersonal	_____ Other
_____ Broadcasting	

INSTITUTION: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Institution Enrollment: _____ Faculty Size: _____

Department: _____

Majors (List): _____

_____

Course Offerings: (Check in area that has at least one course)

_____ Intercultural	_____ Interpersonal	_____ Methods
_____ Organizational	_____ Oral Interp	_____ Speech/Hearing Science
_____ Public Address	_____ Political	_____ Theatre
_____ Public Relations	_____ Rhetoric	_____ Mass Comm
_____ Communication Theory	_____ Education	_____ Small Group

Forensic Program: _____ Yes _____ No

Basic Course; Required of all students: _____ Yes _____ No

Required of some students: _____

_____

Type Required:

_____ Public Speaking	_____ Theory
_____ Survey	_____ Rhetoric
_____ Interpersonal	_____ Other
_____ Broadcasting	

TABLE ONE
COLLEGES BY STATE

STATE	TWO YEAR	FOUR YEAR	TOTAL
Illinois	51	53	104
Ohio	11	53	64
Michigan	27	33	60
Missouri	14	37	51
Minnesota	19	28	47
Iowa	11	31	42
Indiana	5	34	39
Kansas	18	21	39
Oklahoma	11	25	36
Wisconsin	3	31	34
Nebraska	8	14	22
N. Dakota	6	8	14
S. Dakota	1	12	13
TOTAL	185	380	565

TABLE TWO
COURSE OFFERINGS

COURSE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Public Speaking	531	94%
Interpersonal	386	68%
Small Group	334	59%
Mass Comm	318	56%
Rhetoric	305	54%
Theatre	271	48%
Forensics	238	42%
Organizational	211	37%
Comm Theory	190	33%
Education	155	27%
Intercultural	124	22%
Public Relations	119	21%
Poly Comm	85	15%
Methods	66	11%
TOTAL	3333	

TABLE 3
BASIC COURSE

TYPE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Public Speaking	314	77%
Interpersonal	75	18%
Survey	49	12%
Total	405*	

* - Some schools offer a choice of type of basic course

REFERENCES

Career Guidance Foundation - College Catalog Collection, (1990). XVII. 3.

Fischler, A., (1988). From the inferno: Reflections on a sojourn in a communication program. Chronicle of Higher Education. p. A-28.

Macke, F. J., (1991). Communication left speechless: A critical examination of the evolution of speech communication as an academic discipline. Communication Education. 40. 2.

Trott, D., Roach Barker, D. & Barker L.L., (1988). Evaluation of Masters Programs in the Speech Communication Discipline: 1988. Communication Education. 37. 4.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE